

Lessons We Can Learn from the Papacy

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If you were alive in 100 A.D. and were asked the question: Of all that you see in the world in 100 A.D., what would still exist in the year 2018—if you were alive in Europe at that time—what institution has existed throughout that entire time, from roughly the second century until this day? This institution has outlasted governments, countries, rulers, and, since it began, every European institution but it has fallen—it is the last of the ancient autocracies. (An autocracy is a state in which supreme unlimited authority resides in a single person.) This particular autocracy is the last of the ancient ones. The power of this autocracy has lasted and been intact for almost 2,000 years—it's just amazing. So you ask the question: How did it grow from nothing into what it is today, almost 2,000 years down the road? Growing in wealth and in power, in influence, and control—how did that happen? I remember it being said (many times) after the death of the Apostle John, a curtain came down over the Church. Then, a couple hundred years later, when you raise the curtain, the Church was totally different. Why was that?

The answer is because there was a bishop of Rome—that's the basic answer. The papacy is the oldest and most powerful institution that has existed since that day. In fact, referring to the power of the papacy, Joseph Stalin once asked the question: How many divisions has the pope? (Army divisions.) The fact is, Stalin's country lasted only seventy-five years, and the papacy is getting close to 2,000. So which has the most power?

We are going to do four things today. First, we're going to review some basic facts about the papacy, and then we're going to look into the origins of the papacy—how did it come to be. Then the third thing we're going to look at is why has it survived this long? What are its characteristics that have caused it to survive for 2,000 years? And then, most importantly, and this is the title of the sermon: Lessons We Can Learn from the Papacy. These lessons apply to us today in the Churches of God.

Let's look at some basic facts about the papacy. The word "papacy" refers to the office of the pope. The pope is the head of the Roman Catholic Church and he is also the bishop of Rome. His seat of authority is in Rome, and it is called "the Holy See"; you'll occasionally notice it described as such in newspaper or magazine articles: the Holy See, which just refers to his seat of authority in Rome. He lives and works in the Vatican Palace. The Vatican Palace is a group of over 1,000 interconnected buildings within the city limits of Rome. This Vatican Palace is located in the independent state of Vatican City.

Vatican City lies within the city limits of Rome and is the smallest independent state in the world—only 108 acres. It resides on the location of Nero's public garden and his

circus that you read about in history. Vatican City has only a population of approximately 1,000. It is right in the center of Rome. As we are going to see, it is totally independent of any government, including the Italian government and the city government of Rome. People ask what is the worth of the Catholic Church governed by the Vatican—what is the worth? How much money does the pope control? Nobody really knows, but the bankers' best guesses are between ten to fifteen billion dollars. In fact, the Vatican holds \$1.6 billion in the Italian stock market—just the Vatican. That's 15 percent of the entire value of the Italian stock market held by the papacy, the Catholic Church. The Vatican has made huge investments in banking, insurance, chemicals, steel, construction and real estate; these have brought wealth into the Vatican Palace and such wealth is actually controlled by the pope.

Let's ask, what are the pope's powers—where does he exert powers? You can divide it into spiritual powers and physical powers. The spiritual power was culminated in 1870 in the first Vatican council and that council, in 1870, declared him infallible when speaking on matters of faith and morals. It's called *ex-cathedra*. He is infallible when he speaks on faith and morals, and he's infallible because he is a successor to the Apostle Peter. The pope claims divine assistance from Peter when he speaks of such matters, therefore he is infallible because Peter is speaking through him. He has supreme authority of over 5,300 bishops worldwide, over 45,000 priests worldwide, over 415,000 deacons worldwide, and, at last count, over 1.3 billion members of the Catholic Church. So his spiritual powers are far and wide and worldwide.

Now what about physical powers—physical authority? He rules Vatican City, and Vatican City has its own militia, its own flag, its own coins, its own stamps, its own public utilities, its own mail system, its own telephone and broadcast systems, and he controls all of that. The pope is protected by the Swiss guards, recruited in Switzerland. You've probably seen them; they have these very colorful, striped uniforms with puffy sleeves and trousers. The Swiss guards are with him all the time. They are committed, they are sworn—if necessary—to give their life to preserve the life of the pope.

Let's talk a minute about the pope's titles; there are many. By the way, rather than writing all this down, if you want my notes afterward, I'll be happy to make you copies, because it's too much to write down and for the ladies that do the transcribing— whoever gets that odious job—I'll give you my notes. The pope's titles: Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ (we'll get to that in just a minute), Successor of the Prince of the Apostles (the Prince of the Apostles, of course, is Peter, so the pope is considered the successor to Peter), Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the West, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the State of Vatican City. He must be addressed as "Your Holiness."

When first elected by the College of Cardinals, the senior cardinal deacon announces the following. He gives the new pope's name, and he says: He is Father of princes and kings, ruler of the world on earth (that's a lofty title), and Vicar of Our Savior, Jesus Christ. The word "vicar" means in place of, so basically what they are saying is the pope, being the vicar of Christ, implies that he has the same power and the same

authority that Christ had over the Church when Christ was here. Christ is now in Heaven; the pope has the power that Christ had when Christ was on the earth, so he has the same power, the same authority as Jesus Christ, in the form of a human being while Christ is now in heaven.

The pope, when he's elected—you've probably seen it over the years—the new pope comes to the balcony facing St. Peter's Square, and he gives his first blessing to the Catholic Church and to the people, in Latin, and it's called *Urbi et Orbi*. (I finally got to put my high school Latin to use after all these years.) "Urbi et Orbi" means "to the city and to the world." I thought it was interesting—the city comes first. Why not the world and then the city? No, it's the city and the world, because the city is more important because that's where he resides. Here we are, we've described all this wealth, all of this power, all of this authority, but the point is, that prior to 100 A.D., it just didn't exist. Yet here we are today. It came from nothing to what we see today, in less than 2,000 years. How on earth did that happen?

What we're going to do now, is look at the second thing we want to investigate, and this is a history lesson. (As I said, if you want the notes, you are welcome to them.) We're going to look at the origins of the papacy. How did it come to be? As we go through this—we're going to take it century by century—notice the transformation of the true Church into something totally different. It happened by Satan exerting control and taking—really morphing—the true Church into what we see today, and it was by Satan's design, as we're going to see. Notice the progression from nothing to the present power and influence of the papacy. It didn't happen overnight, it happened in small increments, year by year, decade by decade, century by century.

Let's start in the late 90's A.D. after the death of the last apostle, John. There was a letter from a Christian man named Hamas, who was a member of the church in Rome. In that letter (they have records of that letter, copies of that letter) he mentions, "the elders who are in charge of the Church" at that day, right around the turn of the first century there. There's no mention of the apostles being in Rome, there's no mention of Peter being in Rome, just the mention of elders who were in charge of the Church. About that same time, there was a letter from a Christian man named Clement, and he mentions in this letter both Peter and Paul as dying, and associated with "a great multitude of chosen who were put to death through jealousy", he says.

The letter is lengthy and speaks of only two offices at that time, around 100 A.D. There were bishops, which we know in the Greek means "overseers", or elders—they're synonymous—which are presbyters, as they're sometimes called. So you have bishops and then you have deacons; those are the only two offices mentioned at that time in this letter. It's something to keep in mind, because these two titles existed into the second century, then everything changed, as we are going to see.

Now let's look at the century of 100 to 200 A.D. In the first decade of the second century, the first ten years, 100-110 A.D., the churches in Syria and western Asia Minor were governed by single bishops. You will probably be aware of one name—Polycarp.

Many of our ministers have spoken of him over the years. We don't really know the date of his birth, probably around 69 A.D., and we're not sure of his death, probably about 155 A.D. He was the bishop of Smyrna, in present-day Turkey, and by all accounts a righteous man who followed God's law. The bishop of southern France and Lyons, Irenaeus, was born in 115 A.D. and lived to 202 A.D. He wrote that Polycarp was trained by the Apostle John and appointed bishop of Smyrna by the apostles. So Polycarp had contact with and witnessed the example of the apostles. He was bishop of Smyrna and Turkey. This is going to be important in just a little bit. Beginning in the second century, around 100 A.D., the bishop of Rome shared eminence with Polycarp. Polycarp was to the East, the bishop of Rome was in Rome, and they were the two leading bishops in that early Church.

In Rome, things began to change. In 95 A.D. Clement was the bishop of Rome, and he expected obedience. He wrote in a letter to the church of Corinth—let me quote from this letter: "If any disobeys what has been said by Him through us (meaning Christ through Clement) let them know that they will involve themselves in no slight transgression or danger." That's an outright threat. It sounds totally different than the writings of the apostles, doesn't it? Thus things begin to change. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch, in Syria, from 110–117 A.D., and in his letters to the other churches he warns and admonishes, as bishop of Syria. But in letters to the church in Rome (when he was writing to the bishop of Rome), he was unusually respectful and he made only requests; he didn't make any demands to the bishop of Rome. You can come away with the conclusion that the power of the bishop of Rome was on the rise, and the power of the other bishops was slowly, over time, starting to decline.

Ignatius, this bishop of Antioch, praised Christians who ceased keeping the Sabbath, because it was Jewish. And of course, we had to flee anything Jewish back then—that was the old way and we've got the new way. So from approximately 155–166 A.D., Anicetus, who was the bishop of Rome, acted like a monarch. This was the middle of the second century A.D. He began to act like he was in control and in authority. There are records of him discussing doctrinal issues between Rome and the other churches. He was the one who had an issue with Polycarp—the one who was trained and ordained by John and Phillip. In the years 160–162 A.D., he meets with Polycarp and there is a controversy over the date of the passover, because Anicetus and those in Rome kept the Sunday following Fourteen Nisan as the Passover. Polycarp and the bishops in the East insisted that it was to be kept on Fourteen Nisan, not the Sunday after. You begin to notice the subtle shift to a Sunday; that's important down the road.

At this point, Anicetus, bishop of Rome, and Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, agree to disagree. Neither of the two has pre-eminence—no one is dictating to the other because Polycarp was trained by the apostles, so people were treading fairly carefully about that. Then approximately 180 A.D., Irenaeus (we quoted him earlier), bishop of Lyons in southern France, one of the leading theologians of the day, wrote a book titled Against Heresies, to refute Gnostic teaching, which was creeping into the Church and polluting the Church. He was asked if the gospel was handed down from the apostles and guarded by a succession of elders, in a secret tradition (having secret knowledge is

a feature of gnosticism) instead of it being handed down from the apostles to the elders, or was it a secret tradition emanating from revelations to the apostles and handed down through a succession of gnostic teachers? Which was it? A straight line down from Peter or this gnostic influence that's coming into the churches to the present day?

Irenaeus listed a succession of Roman bishops from Peter down to his day, and, he affirmed, this is the succession. That was in 180 A.D. He describes the church at Rome as, and I'm quoting him, "The very great, the very ancient and universally known Church, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul." So they are claiming that this group now is the result of both apostles being in Rome and there's a succession of men who have followed in their footsteps. What happened, we see here, in this latter part of the second century, is that the threat of gnosticism forced the bishops to kind of circle the wagons, so to speak. To fight the threat of gnosticism, they said that there is a succession from Peter to the present Roman bishop, and this aided the power of the bishop of Rome and added to his power. I'm not saying that's the only reason, but it was a reason—the threat of gnosticism.

In 196 A.D., Polycrates, who was the bishop of Ephesus, writes Victor, bishop of Rome, saying, "I could mention the bishops who are present, whom you required me to summon and so I did." He's writing to the bishop of Rome, he is a bishop himself, and he's saying, you required me to call this assembly and I did it. Compare that to Anicetus and Polycarp, where they agreed to disagree, and nobody had the pre-eminence. Now, a short time later, the Roman bishop is ordering a group to come together, and Polycrates complies. You see a shift in power now. After all this happened, Victor excommunicated Polycrates. When he and all the Asian bishops refused to accept Easter Sunday instead of Passover, Victor excommunicated all of the bishops who believed in keeping the Passover as we know it. Polycrates, in a response, told Victor they kept "the date consecrated by the great luminaries, the apostles, John and Phillip." They were not going to budge, so they were excommunicated. The interesting thing is that Victor did not excommunicate the people in the churches. He excommunicated the leaders, but kept the people in the churches—membership and money. This holds true to today—membership and money. And so we'll see as we continue, nothing changes, and that's true today.

Let's now look at the century between 200–300 A.D. This is the time when the cult of Peter—Peter being in Rome, and Peter as the first pope—really takes hold. Approximately 200 A.D., Tertullian (a North African Christian writer, very influential in the early church) was a historian, well-known and mentioned in many accounts today. In his battle against the gnostics, he defended the tradition that both Peter and Paul preached in Rome and died there as martyrs, trying to cement the authority of the bishop of Rome in order to fight these gnostic heresies. He stated that from the church in Rome "come into our hands the very authority of the apostles themselves."

Now you see the tradition forming that authority was passed from Peter down through a succession of bishops in Rome and they have the same authority that Peter had, which is the same authority that Christ had. This tradition is beginning to take hold (around

200–251 A.D., approximately), and it's based on the belief that Peter was in Rome, died in Rome, was martyred in Rome, and was the first pope. (These dates, depending upon source material, are off either by a couple of years—maybe five years). In 251 A.D., approximately, Bishop Cyprian of Carthage spoke of Christ having built His church on Peter while all the apostles possessed equal authority. Peter represented the unity of the church. That was the teaching 251 A.D.; since at that time, of course, the teaching—both in the Catholic Church and in the early days of God's Church—has been that Peter was the head of the apostles. But at this point in 251 A.D., the bishop of Carthage said that they were co-equals, with Peter representing the unity of the church.

Five years later, in 256 A.D., Pope Steven (ruling from 254-257 A.D.) claimed authority from Peter, and he was the first to use Matthew 16:18-19 (... *Upon this rock, I will build my church...*) to justify his authority. In 256 A.D. when he did that, when he made that assertion, no bishops in the East accepted it. They said this is not so—you're overstepping your authority. The bishops in the East began to oppose it, but the bishops in the West accepted it. Then a year later (257-258 A.D.) Pope Sixtus II had the supposed remains of both Peter and Paul removed from a shrine in the Vatican to the Church of St. Sebastian on the Appian Way. Thus began the cult that both apostles were in Rome, both apostles died as martyrs. They had a shrine in the Vatican, they just picked it up and moved it to another church. They had all this ceremony and all this pomp celebrating the fact Peter and Paul were in Rome, died as martyrs—we're their successors, so believe us. That cult of Peter began to take hold.

Now let's look at 300–400 A.D. This is the pivotal century. This is where everything became cemented and changed permanently. The Emperor Constantine began his rule in 306 A.D. and he died in 337 A.D. In 313 A.D. he issued the Edict of Milan. This was a watermark—a sea change—as far as Christians were concerned (true Christians and false Christians) in the Roman Empire. The Edict of Milan gave freedom of worship and equal rights to all religious groups. Constantine was the first emperor to stop the persecution of Christians beginning in 313 A.D. Then, in 321 AD, he enacted a law requiring rest on Sunday for the entire empire. Where did that come from? Rest on Sunday for the entire empire?

Let me read from the [Encyclopedia of Early Christianity](#), page 808, under the heading of [Sabbath](#): “The Sabbath was replaced by Sunday as a result of three apostate influences in the second century.” This is a history book written recently, and they are saying that these are apostate influences that changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and there were three. The first was anti-Judaism, arising from the church's separation from the synagogue. The second: The influence of the sun cults in the Roman Empire, which led the church to make Sunday as the holy day (and I think we know that). If you want to have lots of people come into the church, and they are sun worshippers, and they worship the sun god on Sunday, let's just change it to, instead of the sun god, it's the Son of God and we'll change the day of rest from the Sabbath to Sunday and everybody will be happy—numbers and money. The third was the church of Rome's growing authority shown in changing the day. I remember debating this whole issue with a Protestant friend of mine decades ago; I said, look, if you accept the change from

Saturday to Sunday, you are accepting the authority of the Catholic Church, because they're the ones who made the change. Do you want to follow that tradition or not? You can call yourself a Protestant, but you're still following that tradition. The point is that the pope, the bishop of Rome, influenced Constantine to make these changes and to issue the Edict of Milan, and in 321 A.D., to change to make Sunday a rest day. About that time, they also made Saturday a fast day. Why would they do that? Fast bad, feast good. Saturday bad, Sunday good; it was all part of a plan and we're going to see who is behind it.

In 325 A.D., Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea. That was the first general council of the church, ever. The first thing we should note is who called the meeting. It wasn't the bishop of Rome, it was the emperor of Rome who called the meeting. And the prime subject was the date of Passover and it was ruled in favor of the bishop of Rome. So if you kept the Passover on Fourteen Nissan, you were excommunicated. If you kept it on the Sunday after Fourteen Nissan, you were okay. And this is where Protestants and Catholics today get the Nicene Creed, which is from the Council of Nicaea, going all the way back to 325 A.D. But as I said, the key here, the sea change, was the head of the Roman Empire is now locked in with the Catholic Church; the emperor calls the meeting and has influence on what the outcome of the meeting is. He is being influenced by the bishop of Rome, and the bishop of Rome is being influenced by we-know-who.

In 337 A.D., Constantine was on his death bed. He died that year and on his death bed, he was baptized—shortly before he died. As result of that, he is now a saint in the Catholic Church, and by determination of the Eastern Orthodox Church, sainted Constantine. This pagan, who made a deathbed confession, now is sainted in 337 A.D. Then in 378 A.D., the Roman emperor Gratian (ruling from 367–383) declared that the bishop of Rome should not be subject to trial by a secular court. He issued that edict, he had the power to enforce it. What he did by that was cement his authority above civilian governments—you can't take me to trial, you can't charge me with anything because I am here and you are down here. Thus he cemented his authority. So you see, step by step—the power, the authority, the influence—grows, year by year, decade by decade, century by century.

Then in 380 A.D., the Emperor Theodosius issued the Edict of Thessalonica. He proclaimed in that year that Christianity is the state church of the Roman Empire. Think about that—only 250 years after the death of the Apostle John, this markedly different “Christianity” (and I say that with quotes) is now the official religion of the Roman Empire. How on earth could that happen, if there weren't supernatural forces involved in making it happen? Then in 382 A.D., Pope Adamus (ruling from 366–384), proclaimed that Rome was “pre-eminent over the other churches, because of Christ's promise to Peter.” The eastern churches were a little unstable at times, and they didn't follow in lock-step with the bishop of Rome. So he is making a declaration that we are pre-eminent over all of you, and you'd better accept it. So he is, again, cementing the authority of the pope.

Then between 379-395 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Theodosius, the powerful pagan aristocracy of Rome, the very wealthy—the industrialists of the day, the head merchants of the day, those who owned merchant ships and trade, money lenders and all, who were formerly pagan—were converted to Christianity; this aristocracy had been in decline, so these families that controlled Italy and controlled Rome became Christianized, and they became benefactors of the church. Their contributions went to the Vatican and to the pope. Money flowed in to the Catholic Church as never before—again, numbers and money.

Then in 385 A.D., Pope Siricius (ruling from 384–399) wrote to the bishop of Spain, saying, “he who bears the burden in us, is the blessed Apostle Peter, who in everything, as we trust, protects and watches over us [that’s the royal us, meaning me] the heirs of his administration.” So the pope is openly saying, I am the heir of Peter’s administration; Peter speaks through me, Peter acts through me, and Peter protects us. So you see from 300-400 A.D., just 100 years, Christianity went from being persecuted to being the state religion of the Roman Empire—now think of that. There have to be forces behind that, that human beings can’t see and don’t understand.

Now let’s take the century of 400–500 A.D. In 431 A.D., Rome was the unchallenged leader of the church in the West, and the bishops in the East accorded higher honor to it, regarding it as the center through which they should communicate. Gradually, over time, the bishops in the East declined in power, and all that power flowed to the pope in Rome. During that time, the Roman emperor was responsible for summoning councils, investigating doctrinal matters, and bringing theologians together; the emperor also maintained discipline in the church. If dissidents got out of line, the pope would go to the emperor, complain of a problem, and the emperor would take action.

Then in 445 A.D., Emperor Valentinian demands obedience to the pope due to the association with Apostle Peter and Rome’s status as the capital of the Empire. The emperor is no fool—if he can have a unified religion over the whole empire and he can have Rome at the center of that religion, then he has more control and more power as emperor, because the people worship the pope. Mary is coming on the scene as one to worship, as are the apostles, and everything is becoming centralized.

Then we come to Pope Leo, who was very powerful (ruling from 440–461 A.D.), and, as you know, the Roman Empire fell close to 500 A.D. But in 451 A.D., at the Council of Chalcedon, 630 bishops unanimously declared the following in a letter: “What Leo believes, we all believe. Anathema to him who believes anything else. Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo.”

You have to stop and ask the question, where is God in all this? We’re talking about Peter speaking through human beings, and human beings following other human beings, and God is not even in the picture. As you go through and do the research, and you read all of these letters and historical accounts, God is hardly mentioned at all. Human beings are mentioned, Peter is mentioned, maybe Paul occasionally, but not God; He is not mentioned.

In 452 A.D., the famed Hun, Attila, King of the Huns (you've heard of him), threatened Rome. Now the Roman historians say that Leo came to meet him, and as a result of that meeting, Attila turned and retreated and went back to where he came from. Today, some historians say Attila withdrew because there was a plague in his ranks, and everybody was so sick that they couldn't fight Rome, and he left. Someday we'll know the truth. In 455 A.D., three years later, Leo intervened to save Rome from Genseric, leader of the Vandals, who threatened to destroy the city. Pope Leo went out and met him and Genseric did not sack the city.

In 476 A.D. the Roman Empire fell. The important thing is, the papacy did not. Can you imagine that? The Roman Empire falls, and it's in chaos, but the papacy remains. What an astounding thing!

Between 590 and 604 A.D., Pope Gregory I made the edict that the clergy was not to marry. This is 500 years after the fact—it didn't happen before that. Priests and bishops and all clergy, prior to that, could marry freely. Judging from today, you would think that this had always been the case, but it's not so. The end of the sixth century into the early seventh century is when that change occurred, requiring priests to be celibate. Then in 800 A.D., Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor of the Romans on Christmas Day, and Charlemagne, now as emperor, knelt before the pope. The pope put the crown on his head and proclaimed him leader of the Romans and in doing so, Charlemagne humbled himself before the pope. The pope was the one who gave honor, and Charlemagne was the one who received the honor. That symbolism went all throughout Europe—who was really the boss—and it was the pope who crowned kings.

We're going to jump to 1929. We could go all through it in greater detail but we just don't have the time. In 1929 there was a treaty signed, known as the Lateran Treaty, between the pope and Italy, as a nation. The prime force of this treaty was, get this, the pope recognized Italy as a country. Italy had been in existence for how long?—and now the pope says, in 1929, Italy is now a country. We have to remember that previously the pope owned most of Italy. You've heard of the Papal States. The pope owned vast amounts of what is now Italy. So what the pope basically did was give that territory to the nation of Italy, the government of Italy. You don't do that unless you want something in return. In return, Italy recognized "the sovereign independence of the Holy See in the international field." That means that the nation of Italy has no control over what the Vatican does, what the pope does, all over the world—total independence.

The second thing coming out of the treaty was that Italy recognized the Holy See's jurisdiction of the Vatican, the 108 acres. So with the Lateran Treaty, the Italian government, the soldiers, the police, and the lawyers can't even set foot in the Vatican and have no control over the Vatican because it is an independent state and it is ruled only by the pope. So yes, they gave up some land, but look what they got.

So we see here in closing out this section, in less than 2,000 years, the bishop of Rome came to be the most powerful man on earth. Governments came and went, dictators came and went, presidents and prime ministers came and went, but the bishop of Rome and his successors came to be the most powerful men on earth, and were declared infallible. The man holding the office was known as the pope, or *papa*, meaning father.

The third thing we're going to examine today: Why has the papacy survived this long? What are the conditions that allowed this to happen? The first is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple created a religious vacuum. True Christians of the day, first-century Christians, were all decentralized; there was no dictatorial head. The individual churches didn't physically come together because of travel problems and persecution problems. So the true Church—the original Church—was de-centralized; it was persecuted and the individuals within it were persecuted.

Let's go to Jude 1:4. Jude was written somewhere (there is great disagreement about it) between 65 and 80 A.D. Notice what Jude says. Certain things were happening within the Church even then.

Jude 1:4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (KJV)*

Now if that doesn't describe the Catholic Church, I don't know what does because they were putting men and tradition ahead of God and Christ. Look at the progression, starting 100 A.D. to the present day. Men and tradition supersede what God's Word says in the Bible. So that's the first influence.

The second influence is the stability and the influence of Rome. Rome was the capital of the western world. The only other rival in that sense—and it wasn't—was China; China had dynasties at that time, but had no impact on the western world, none whatsoever. The Vatican came to be the physical representation of power and influence religiously and politically. St. Peter's Basilica is where the Apostle Peter was said to be buried. His bones are said to be right there, a claim even to this day. It's been proven false, but that is the claim. So the church said to the whole Catholic membership, Peter's bones are here, the current pope is a descendent—a straight line—from Peter, and this is Christ on earth in that regard—this pope.

The Vatican became the central power, the center of power, and it was aided by the influence of the gnostics. They circled the wagons, so to speak, increasing the power to fight these outside influences. Then, as we read, the Roman Emperor Constantine and Theodosius became involved in and controlled Christianity. They called the councils and they put pressure on bishops to make certain decisions. It was power and control over the people by the bishop of Rome and the emperor. One's interest was the same as the other's—power, control, money. Then we have the Lateran Treaty that we just described where Italy has sovereign jurisdiction; sovereign independence. The Vatican

has that to this day. The stability of Rome, the influence of Rome, was a huge factor in the growing power of the pope.

The third influence is the internationality of the papacy. There have been over 260 popes. They count Peter as the first, of course. The fact is, the popes have come from all over the world and that has aided the unity of the Catholic Church. Let me give you some examples. There have been nine popes from Palestine, Syria, or the Near East. There have been seventeen popes from Greece, seventeen from France, six from Germany, three from Africa, the Goths had two, Sardinia had two. Hungary had a pope, England had one, Portugal had one, and now the current pope is from Argentina. The fact is, the internationalism of the papacy cemented the worldwide influence of the Catholic Church.

Now we come to the fourth and the most important and that is the influence of Satan. Let's go to Revelation 13:1. This scripture obviously is a prophecy, but it talks about what has occurred previously, too. And given what we just discussed today and the history of it, think about this prophecy in light of what has happened already.

Revelation 13:1 *And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast [and we know this beast is the Roman Empire] rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns [ten resurrections of the Roman Empire], and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. [This is not something involving God and truth.]*

2) And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. (KJV)

Now this is looking back, and this beast is rising. We see it's not a stretch to say that Satan was involved from the very beginning. Satan was behind all of this. Now let's jump to chapter 17 and verse 1.

Revelation 17:1 *And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore [we understand that's the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy] that sitteth upon many waters:*

2) With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication ... (KJV)

This is looking back. The kings of the earth, for thousands of years, have committed fornication with this great whore.

2 continued) ... and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication [the whole world is caught up in this].

3) So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4) *And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls [indicating this woman was very, very rich; now think about that, given what we've been talking about], having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:*

5) *And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.*

6) *And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints [the true Christians, the ones who gave their lives for the truth], and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: [so, while claiming to be religious, they put to death those who held to the truth] and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*

7) *And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns ...*

18) *... the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth. (KJV)*

Rome is that city. Remember what the pope said? *Urbi et Orbi* (“to the city and to the world”). Rome was the center of it all. Here’s the point, the influence of Satan: If Satan can get control of the world’s largest religious organization, how many billions can he influence? That is his plan, and that’s exactly what has happened. I might add, he’s also done it through Islam, getting control of it, probably inspiring its creation, and look at the billions who are influenced there. I know that’s not a popular statement, given our politically correct times, but I believe it’s the truth. If Satan can get control of religious organizations, billions of people can be influenced to follow him and not know it.

So now we come to the last point. What lessons can we learn from all of this? George Santayana was a philosopher and an author. He lived from 1863–1952. You’ve heard this quote before. He said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” So why is this record here? It’s for us to learn from, and to learn lessons from that we don’t repeat, so that we don’t follow the errors of the past. What are the lessons we can learn from this history?

1. Peter was never the head of the true Church.

He just wasn’t. He was most likely never in Rome. Remember, Peter was tasked with preaching the gospel to the Jews, so why would he go to Rome in the first place? A quick reference—we won’t turn there—but you might study it later, if you wish; in Acts 10 we find Peter in Jaffa and Caesarea, on the coast of Palestine. In Acts 12, remember Peter was cast into prison in Jerusalem and he was later freed by an angel, so he was in Jerusalem then. In Acts 15, in 49 A.D.—the ministerial conference regarding circumcision—Peter was at that conference in Jerusalem. If you read Acts 15, you understand that there was no dictatorial head at that conference. (You can check a sermon on our website that was given on December 23, 2017, [Lessons from the Acts 15 Conference](#); go to pacificcog.org and click on “Sermon Archives”.) Then in Acts 28, Paul was in Rome, and we find in verse 22 that the Jews in Rome knew nothing about Christ—this is towards the end of the book of Acts. At the end of Acts,

when Paul was in prison, and the Jews in Rome knew nothing about Christ, then how is it that Peter was there before? If Peter had been there, he would have been preaching Christ, and people would have known about it. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, and the Jews certainly would have known of it, but in Acts 28, there is no record of that. There is no mention of Peter having been there, in Acts 28.

Let me quote from a book, The History of Rome, by Dr. Thomas Dyer, on page 295. “The first Roman converts to Christianity appeared to have had very inadequate ideas of the sublime purity of the gospel, and to have entertained [notice this] a strange medley of pagan idolatry and the Christian truth.” Well, if Peter and Paul were both there, how did that happen? We know Paul was there and he was in prison, but the fact is that the Romans mixed pagan idolatry with some of the Christian truth. Then down the road, Sabbath went to Sunday because of the influence of sun worship, and sunrise services were instituted for the same reason. All of these changes came to be because there was a mixture of paganism and some of the truth of the Bible.

Now if you look at the book of Romans—Paul wrote the book of Romans, obviously, to the Romans in Rome—if Peter was in Rome, don’t you think Paul would have sent greetings to Peter, addressing Peter and saying thank you for all that you’re doing? There is no mention of Peter being in Rome in the book of Romans.

So when you put all the facts together, the true Church had no dictatorial head, and Peter was most likely never in Rome. If he was ever there, it’s not recorded and he was there a very short period of time. The Church had no dictatorial head as claimed by the papacy and the Catholic Church.

The second lesson we can learn as God’s people:

2. Brethren have done to Mr. Armstrong what men have done to the pope.

Think about that for a minute; others today repeat the same error. Some have viewed and do view Mr. Armstrong in the way that the Catholics look at the pope—meaning infallible, ex-cathedra. In other words, every word that he said is at the level of scripture and has the authority of scripture. There are people today in God’s Church that believe that just as Catholics believe that when the pope speaks on matters of morals and ethics and God’s law, he cannot err—he can make no error. Several groups today teach that Herbert Armstrong restored all things and believe doctrine is frozen as of January 1986, when he died. Now let’s ask a question: Was the Church perfect in doctrine and in teaching and understanding in January of 1986? My observation is that this is just not true, otherwise how can we grow in grace and knowledge?

Let’s go to John 17:3. You see, our job is to grow—in grace, yes, and in knowledge of God and Christ—John 17:3 explains it. These are Christ’s words; He is speaking and He’s telling us what eternal life is.

John 17:3 *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (KJV)*

Now the fact is that when we were baptized, we didn't have all knowledge just pour into our heads as though by a miracle. Knowing God and knowing Christ is a lifelong process in this physical life, but it's also going to be a lifelong process in the spiritual life. Do you think that just because we are resurrected as spirit beings, we'll know everything about God? Because eternity hasn't happened yet, and there are things to come that we can't even imagine. You can't put it in years, but way down the road, after we're spirit beings, do you think we might know more about God than the day we are resurrected? Well, of course.

What Christ is saying here in John 17 is eternal life is a process that begins with our baptism, but it never ends. We know more and more about God and Christ, so this is not—please understand—to diminish Mr. Armstrong; we are here in part because of the work God did through him in providing us a foundation, but he was not infallible—he just wasn't. He was a human being like all of us. So the lesson here is we need to look to God and His Word, and not to men.

3. The early bishops of Rome fled from Judaism.

The early church, as the bishops of Rome increased their influence, opposed Judaism. The bishops of Rome created a fast day on the Sabbath and a feast day on Sunday. This was done to distance the church from Judaism and to establish their own authority. The Worldwide Church of God did the same thing. I'm not saying there wasn't a plan—it was a part of the times. Some over-emphasized obedience—a lot of men were coming out of the military, and it was just a natural consequence, an aftereffect of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War—thus we over-emphasized obedience and we under-emphasized love. We under-emphasized love because the Protestants emphasized it, and we wanted to distance ourselves as far from the Protestants as we could, so for a long period of time, love wasn't discussed much. We under-emphasized God's love for us and His love for the brethren.

Let's go to Mark 12 and begin in verse 30 and see what Christ says. This is what we should be doing. Christ had just been asked what is the first commandment of all? Pretty good question.

Mark 12:30 *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*

31) And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (KJV)

We won't turn there, but in John 13:35, Christ said *all shall know you are My disciples if you have love one to another.* He emphasized it. Then (we won't turn there again) in

1 John 3:14—this is one that hit me in the head about twenty years ago—it says, *we know that we have passed from death to life. Why? Because we love the brethren.*

That's what we should be doing, loving God with all our being and loving our brethren, loving our neighbor as ourselves. We have to do both. The point I'm making here in ending this third point is that God's Word has to be our sole authority, independent of what's going on around us. Just because the Protestants are doing this and the Catholics are doing that and somebody else is doing something else, we can't change who we view as the sole authority. We can't change that because God doesn't change, Christ doesn't change, God's Word doesn't change. So the lesson here has to be God's Word has to be our sole authority, not anything else.

4. We can't mix worldliness and politics with religion.

What a lesson that is! The papacy did exactly that and look at what we've just covered. Let's go to Philippians 3:20. This is something that we just can't forget. We can't mix politics and religion. I'll read this out of the New King James. This is a very short verse.

Philippians 3:20 *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (NKJV)*

We need to remember that we are not citizens of the country that we live in, once we are converted and once we have God's Holy Spirit. That's why we don't participate in politics, that's why we don't participate in jury duty, we don't participate in voting or the military, we don't pledge allegiance to a country—we pledge allegiance to God Almighty and we pledge ourselves to follow His Word. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 (we won't turn there) it says *...and don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers...* and then in verse 17 we have to come out of that, which we do. So the question here is (in closing out point four): Where's my loyalty? Where is my ultimate loyalty? Is it to God or is it to men? Is it to God or is it to an organization or a government or a tradition? Which is it? Is it to God's Word or what men say about God's Word? Where is our loyalty? That is something that all of us need to consider every day, and I'm speaking to myself.

The fifth and last lesson we need to learn—this is the most important one, because this gets to the core of the matter—looking at the history we've covered today, one fact just jumps out:

5. Satan is very deceptive and Satan is very patient.

We know Satan deceives the entire world; Revelation 12:9. It doesn't happen overnight. Satan deceives the world but it's a process that takes time. And look at what has happened in the last 2,000 years. The deception is almost whole. Look at what's going on—the morals, the ethics—in our country. The deception grows and grows every year, every decade, every century, every millennia. Look at how patient Satan is. It took centuries to deceive and pollute Christianity. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians are the earliest New Testament writings. We won't turn there, but notice what was happening

even then: 2 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul says *the mystery of iniquity is already at work*. That's not that long after the Church was founded and was formed. It took just a few hundred years, but look at the billions Satan has influenced and deceived.

The lesson we have to learn is Satan is deceptive and he's patient. What Satan has done with the world he attempts to do with us, you see? If he doesn't get us today, he'll try again tomorrow. He doesn't take vacations, he doesn't go to sleep, he doesn't take time off. If he tries today and we succeed in rejecting him, he's not going to leave us alone. He's going to try tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. We know we have an adversary. (1 Peter 5:8) *Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary [the Greek word for adversary means "arch enemy"] the devil walks about like a roaring lion*, and he picks God's people off through false teaching—many instances in the New Testament, many verses about false apostles. 2 Corinthians 11:13 is one such verse; you can check it later. False apostles disguise themselves as the apostles of Christ. Paul says in the very next verse that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light, so we have to be careful. And the key is that Satan never rests. And where is our warfare? It's against powers of darkness, isn't it? Ephesians 6:12. Mighty powers of darkness, wicked spirits in heavenly realms.

So let's understand that Satan is trying to get to us every day in every way possible, whatever our weakness is. He knows our weaknesses. He's not going to attack us where we're strong. He's going to attack us where we're weak. And every day he plots to get to us. A little bit at a time, a little bit at a time, change an attitude over time, change a mindset over time—weeks, months, years—until a switch is thrown and off we go. The message is, the lesson is, we can't let down our guard, especially as we get closer to the end. Now let's close.

Looking at this whole subject of the papacy, and the growth of the papacy, from nothing—it seems impossible. How could it grow from nothing to what it is today— influence over billions, wealth beyond measure—how could that happen? The Catholics believe only God could do it and they believe that's a justification of their faith. But we know the power of Satan, and Satan can do that in spades. So let's be thankful that we know there's another source behind the rise of the papacy. God has revealed it to us little folks, who are the weak of the world, but God has revealed it to us, and let's be thankful for that.

This is what amazes me—there has always been a true Church, a little remnant, down through those 2,000 years; during the time that the Catholic Church was growing in power and might, there's always been a little group somewhere on earth, or little groups scattered around the world, that are true, faithful followers of God and Christ and Their Word. So we need to be most thankful that we are part of that little flock that has stayed true.